

Small and Mid-Size Farms

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The official link for this solicitation is: http://www.nifa.usda.gov/funding/rfas/sbir_rfa.html

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Department of Agriculture

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Description:

The Small and Mid-Size Farms topic area aims to promote and improve the sustainability and profitability of small and mid-size farms and ranches (where annual sales of agricultural products are less than \$250,000 for small farms and \$500,000 for mid-size farms - hereafter referred to as small farms). The vast majority of farms in this country are small and they play an important role in the agricultural sector. The viability and sustainability of small farms is important to the Nation's economy and to the stewardship of our biological and natural resources. Small farms are also critical to sustaining and strengthening the leadership and social fabric of rural communities. Applicants are strongly encouraged to emphasize how their project would contribute to the well-being of rural communities and institutions. In particular, applicants should emphasize how the results of their project would be disseminated to other small farmers and provide benefit to the small farm community.

Food safety, climate change, food security and sustainable bioenergy are all important program priorities in this topic area. Proposals are encouraged that focus on one or more of these priorities and are appropriately scaled so as to apply to the needs and capabilities of small farmers.

To meet these identified needs in the small and mid-size farm sector, the program's long-term goals (10 years) are to achieve improvements in sustainability and profitability of small farms with increased production of specialty crops and specialty animals; improved farm management skills in small farmers that leads to more sustainable and profitable small farms; better stewardship of

natural resources through adoption of more sustainable farming practices; enhanced utilization of renewable energy sources and more focus on energy efficiency and energy conservation; and better educated small farmers who are better able to operate their farms on a sustainable and profitable basis.

FY 2012 Research Priorities:

Examples of appropriate subtopics for research applications from small businesses include, but are not limited to the following:

1. **New Agricultural Enterprises**– Efforts are needed to develop new agricultural enterprises that are small scale and focused on specialty farm products, both plant and animal, and on innovative ways to market these farm products through direct marketing, such as farmer's markets or cooperatives where the financial return to the farmer is optimized or through specialty market outlets that offer a higher financial return. Emphasis is encouraged for organic and natural foods, specialty animal products, such as free-range poultry or natural beef, non-food specialty crops, such as medicinal herbs and value-added food, and non-food products.
2. **Development of New Marketing Strategies** - Efforts are needed to develop appropriate new strategies for marketing agricultural, forestry and aquacultural commodities and value-added products produced by small farms in local, regional, national and international markets, including the assessment of consumer demand; identification of desired product characteristics, including packaging and processing methods; development of new and innovative utilization of existing production and processing technologies; and the promotion of efficient assembling, packing, processing, advertising and shipping methods.
3. **Farm Management**– Efforts are needed to develop tools and skills that are appropriate for small farms that will enhance the efficiency and profitability of small farms. New tools are also needed that will enhance farm safety. Development of new risk management tools to facilitate better planning is needed. Innovative ways to promote agro-tourism as a way to enhance farm profitability is encouraged.
4. **Natural Resources and Renewable Energy**– Efforts are needed to develop farming methods scaled appropriately for small farms that are directed at more efficient use of natural resources. Particular emphasis is needed to develop better ways to utilize renewable energy sources, such as wind, solar, and geothermal energy, and to promote improved energy efficiency and conservation in farming operations.
5. **Educational Outreach**– Efforts are needed to develop new tools to ensure that the next generation of small farmers has access to the information and resources they need to operate their small farms on a sustainable and profitable basis.

Other Key Information

- **ALL ATTACHMENTS MUST BE SUBMITTED IN THE PORTABLE DOCUMENT FORMAT (PDF).**
- All Phase I applications should give the reviewing community a brief vision of where the PD expects the project to be at the end of Phase II (entering Phase III commercialization).
- Applications exceeding the budget limitation or exceeding the page limit or not meeting the formatting requirements will be excluded from NIFA review.
- The applicants are strongly encouraged to contact the National Program Leader regarding the suitability of research topic.